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Paping, R.F.J.

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People around Baker Jan Geerts of Molenrij, the founding father of one of the Catholic Halsema Families

Richard Paping (1962) is senior university lecturer in economic and social history at the University of Groningen. Richard specializes in research of the Northern Netherlands. He is a great-great-grandson of Theodora Halsema (IVb.1) and Hindericus Meijer.

Introduction: the Halsemaheerd and the old Halsemas

Often, families do not descend in the male line from people of the same name who lived several centuries earlier. That is because people occasionally took their family name from their mother, their grandmother or from their wife. Also, sometimes they chose to use the name of the farm where they lived. The descendants of Jan Geerts did both. The children and grandchildren of his only son Julle Jans called themselves after the farm Groot-Halsum where Julle lived (in the 17th century it was still named *Halsemaheerd*). This Julle Jans married Elisabeth Freerks in 1754, and Elisabeth Freerks herself was a daughter of Catharina/Trijntje Scheltes Halsema. Thanks to this marriage, an artisan family was transformed into a family of farmers, around the middle of the eighteenth century. This turned out to be a fortuitous move. In the first half of the eighteenth century, artisans and farmers on middle-sized farms had a quite equal economic standing, because agriculture was having serious problems due to unusually low grain prices, cattle epidemics, and flooding. However, in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, the wealth of the Groningen farmers rose so dramatically, that in about 1850 the status and wealth of farmers was far above that of bakers and blacksmiths.

The farm Halsemaheerd had been a family possession for centuries. It is certain that the sixteenth century residents and owners of the Halsemaheerd, such as Broerke Does tho Halsum (around 1580), Jacob Halsema (around 1550), Garbrant Halsema (around 1520) and possibly also Tyasse Halbetsuma (1462) were ancestors or at least close relatives of the Jacob Halsema and Catharina/Trijntje who at the end of the sixteenth century lived on the farm.¹ The names of Jacob Halsema and Catharina appear on the old beam dated 13 December 1599, that was reused on the current farm, Groot-Halsum.

Jemme, a daughter of Jacob Halsema and Catharina Halsema, married Rienje Tammes around 1615 and settled on Rienje's ancestral farm in Zuurdijk (now called Pollux). This farm, formerly monastery land, was first used by his parents, Tamme Rienjes/Renkes and Anna Scheltes and before that by his grandfather, Renke Abels. After the capture of the city of Groningen by Willem Lodewijk of Nassau and his Calvinist troops (the Reduction), the Reformation spread quickly. Rienje Tammes and Jemme, however, remained true to their Catholic faith. In 1647 they moved from Zuurdijk to *her* ancestral farm, the Halsemaheerd, in the Catholic bastion of Kloosterburen. There they succeeded in buying a large part of the farm and its adjacent land (about 50 hectares) from a relative. This relative, Haike Halsema, lived in Loppersum, where several other Halsemas could be found in the seventeenth century. After moving into the Halsemaheert, Rienje Tammes started calling himself consistently Rienje Tammes *Halsema*,

Their youngest son, Schelte Rienjes Halsema, succeeded his father to the farm in about 1666. The ownership of the farm fell in the hand of a different branch of the family. These new owners split off about 30 acres from the western side of the Halsemaheerd and added it to the farm Dam.² They also acquired some property directly to the east of the Halsemaheerd, land that contained the farm house of Jan Lammerts (resident 1662-1708). This land was popularly known as "Klein Halsum". The 14 acres of this little farm were annexed to the Halsemaheerd after the Christmas flood of 1717. We have not been able to find any proof that Halsemas ever lived on this farm.

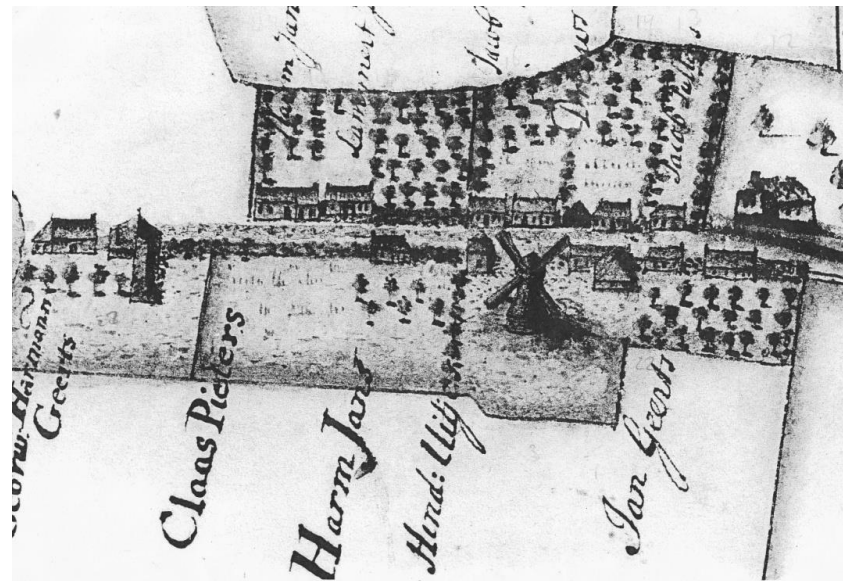
¹ Gert Schansker and Richard Paping are currently collaborating on a long term project unraveling the kinship ties between all the Halsemas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The insights in this article are therefore also to be credited to the aforementioned Gert Schansker.

² We will use the English term acre (about 0.4 hectare) instead of the Groningen measure 'juk' which was actually about 25% larger (about 0.5 hectare).

Schelte Rienjes Halsema married three times, but we only know the name of his second wife, Grietje Balles.³ Around 1714 one of his daughters, Catharina/Trijntje Scheltes Halsema, took over Halsemaheerd. This daughter was married to Freerk Willems Boelens from the old Boelens family of Feddemahuis, near Kloosterburen (today known as Feddemaherd).⁴ Their daughter Elisabeth Freerks was the one who in 1754 married Julle Jans (the son of Jan Geerts) and inherited the use of the farm that by then was referred to as Groot-Halsum. Therefore, the Halsemas, who descended from Jan Geerts, can definitely trace their lineage back to the old Halsemas.

The family of Jan Geerts, baker of Molenrij: his stepfather

We encounter the founding father Jan Geerts in the historical records for the first time in January 1725. He was single and bought from Anna Catharina Jans Filips, widow of Eling Hindriks in Kloosterburen, her home with adjoining bakery and associated bakery paraphernalia, located on lands belonging to Tamme Scheltes Halsema. The land on which the building stood was rented for four guilders.⁵ A certain Popke Freerks acted as guarantor. We will meet him again later on.⁶ In 1727, we find Jan Geerts indeed living in Molenrij near Kloosterburen on the south side of the road,⁷ according to an old map (see below). At his wedding with Aagtje Julles on 21 September 1727 he was said to have come from Kloosterburen. We are not certain if Jan Geerts really was *born* in Kloosterburen, but it is certainly possible. Source documents for the years around 1700 in Kloosterburen are very scarce and it was probably around this time that he was born. It is clear though, that his family was already living for some time in that Catholic bastion of Groningen.



The stepfather of Jan Geerts was called Jan Hijbels. He was mentioned in February 1722 when he wanted to have a loan of 200 guilders returned from Trijntje Jacobs Halsema, the wife of Hindrik Heeres.⁸ It seems that this couple, in spite of their living on a large provincial farm, had fallen into financial problems. It is possible that the heavy burden laid on farmers in connection with the big flood of Christmas night 1717 had

³ In the literature a certain Trijntje Jans is wrongly referred to as his first wife, but that is based on an inaccurate interpretation of a particular document: GrA, Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-97 (30-5-1692). Based on the naming customs, her name might possibly have been Trijntje Jacobs, but she has not yet been found in any of the sources.

⁴ J.M.B. Boelens en O.J. Nienhuis, *Boelens, een RK familie met een grote Bossche tak* (Bedum 2006).

⁵ Tammes Scheltes Halsema was a son of the aforementioned Schelte Rienjes Halsema.

⁶ GrA, RK parochie Den Hoorn, inv.nr. 427.

⁷ M. Schroor, *De Atlas der Provincielanderijen van Groningen (1722-1736)* (Groningen 1996) 39-40.

⁸ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-300, rechte dag Kloosterburen 16 februari 1722.

something to do with it. In the parish of Kloosterburen alone 47 houses were flushed away by the sea and 178 people had drowned (more than one third of the population). Little remained of the sea dike and farmers had to contribute quite a bit to finance the restoration. To make matters worse, in the two months of March and April of 1722 both Hindrik Heeres and Trijnje Jacobs Halsema died one after the other, followed shortly after by one of their children. Heere Tonnis, one of their creditors immediately removed three cows from the farm. Jan Hijbels, another creditor, protested. This was in April 1722. In November 1722 Heere Tonis and Jan Hijbels were still arguing over the proceeds of the sale of Hindrik Heeres's goods.⁹ It is not clear if Jan Hijbels was related to Trijnje Jacobs. She was at any rate a daughter of Jacob Scheltes Halsema and Ide Luurts and was married before with Hindrik Klaasen.¹⁰ After 1722 Jan Hijbels is no longer mentioned in any documents. He had definitely died by 1727. There is no doubt that he was the father of the same Hijbel Jans who married in 1740 and who was the half-brother of Jan Geerts.

The family of Aagtje Julles, wife of Jan Geerts

Baker Jan Geerts did well in marrying Aagtje Julles. She was coming from of a middle-sized farm in Uithuizen. Her father, Julle Wichers, rented the land (today known as 'Boukemaheerd' after a later user) from the noble family Alberda van Menkema on Menkemaborg. In 1730, Julle Wichers was listed in the tax register (even though he had already died) with the amount of 1 guilder and 10 nickels.¹¹ Therefore, he clearly was not one of the wealthiest farmers. His brother Jan Wichers was listed as paying the slightly higher sum of two guilders. Nevertheless, the family of Aagtje Julles was evidently considered more important than the family of Jan Geerts, taking into account that their one and only son was named after *her* father. Remarkably not one single child is named after Griete Sijwerts, the mother of Aagtje Julles, in spite of the fact that with three daughters, there were three chances to honor her name. The daughters were called in order of birth: Aagtje, Aaltje and Maria.

Julle Wichers and Griete Sijwerts, the parents of Aagtje Julles, took over the 'Boukemaheerd' from Julle's father, Wicher Siabbes. Siabbe Julles, who presumably was the father of Wicher Siabbes, was already farmer around 1630 in Uithuizermeeden on an average sized farm. The parents of Griete Sijwerts were Siewert Sickes and Fenne Herteliefs of Uithuizen, who married in Usquert in 1662. Griete Sijwerts had a brother called Sicke Sijwerts who was blacksmith in Rasquert. Sicke had a daughter, Fenje Sickes, who was once asked to be godmother of a child of Jan Geerts and Aagtje Julles. Fenje Sickes is therefore a first cousin of Aagtje and after her marriage with Eisse Ariens she too settled in Kloosterburen. Griete Sijwerts, the mother of Aagtje Julles was already dead when Aagtje Julles married in May 1727. Her father, Julle Wichers died three months later, in December 1727, followed by her unmarried sister Scheltje Julles in February 1728. Her only known brother, Sijwert Julles had already died in February of 1724. The result of all these deaths was that after February 1728 there were only two sisters alive. Aagtje's sister Fenje Julles took over the ancestral farm. She married around 1728 with Ties Elings, son of Eling Lamberts and Magdalena Thijs, farmers in Zandeweer. The 'Boukemaheerd' remained in the hands of this family until the start of the nineteenth century.¹²

Martje Geerts, sister of Jan Geerts, and her son, Cornelis Jans

Jan Geerts had at least one sister. She was called Martje Geerts. In 1728 and 1729 she was godmother of his two oldest children. The second time, 30 October 1729, she was a good three months pregnant. On 19 February 1730 she married the old widower Jan Cornelis, innkeeper at Den Hoorn, who already was 72 years old. The story behind this wedding remains unclear, but one and a half months later, on 1 April 1730, she gave birth to a healthy son, Cornelis Jans. Judging by the name, Jan Cornelis was definitely the father. Jan Cornelis had a previous son Cornelis Jans with his first wife, Bouke Eisses. This Cornelis Jans (with numerous offspring) had died just before. Jan Cornelis and Martje Geerts were reasonably well off, even though he only

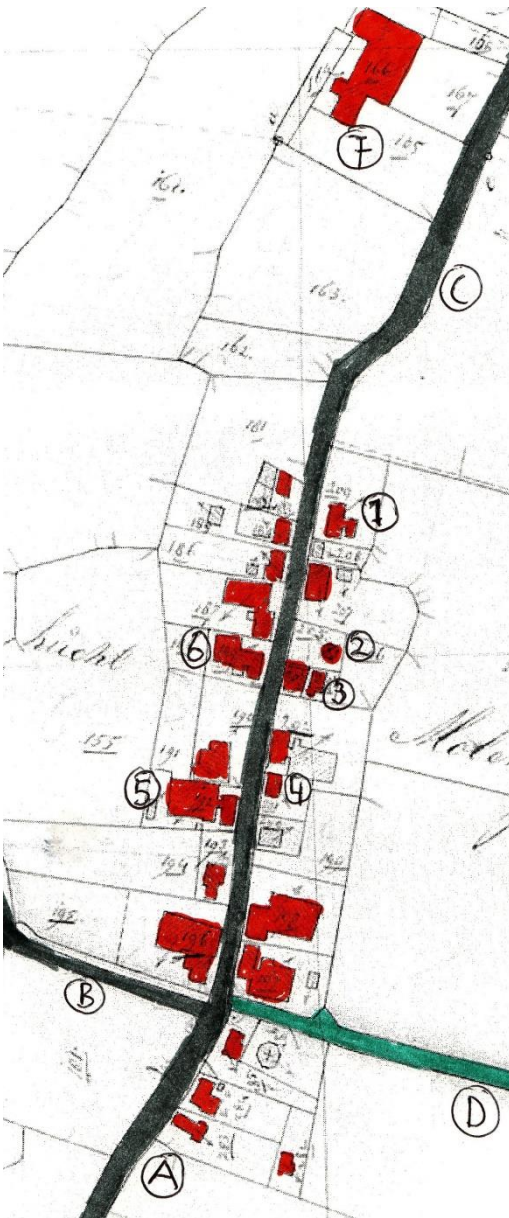
⁹ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-300, rechte dag Kloosterburen, 27 Apr 1722 and 2 Nov 1722.

¹⁰ Jacob Scheltes Halsema was also a son of Schelte Rienjes Halsema.

¹¹ GrA, Statenarchief, inv.nr. 2217. A stuiver (nickel) was the 20th part of a guilder.

¹² For the Boukemaheerd see: T.B. Bierema e.a. *Boerderijen op het Hoogeland* (Bedum 2002): The description contains a few inaccuracies: Ties Elings did not come from Kloosterburen but from Uithuizen. He never remarried an Aaltje N and he died in 1773 instead of 1790.

paid two guilders according to the tax register of 1730. Jan Cornelis was owner of 15 1/8th acres of the farm 'Blau Binnenhoes' in Warfhuizen, 12½ acres of the farm 'St. Hubertus' in Den Hoorn, 6 acres unattached land south of Den Hoorn and 12 acres in Kloosterburen near Kleine Huisjes. Part of this land came from his first wife Bouke Eisses (a daughter of Eisse Derks and Lijsbeth Luurts) and in 1730 already bestowed on the children of his first marriage.



A schema of the houses in Molenrij in de 18th century.

Legend:

1. The bakery first of Jan Geerts, later of Cornelis Jans.
2. The old grain mill of Jan Jans Roo, later Jan Jules (Halsema), succeeded by Albert Reinolts (Danhof) and Aagtje Jules (Halsema).
3. The mill house with the 'chercherhut'.
4. The laborers home of Cornelis Jans.
5. The shop of Lammert Jans and Aagtje Jules (Halsema).
6. The bakery first of Harm Jans Vliedorp, later of Hijbel Jans.
7. The farm, first of Freerk Popkens, later of Hindrik Freerks and Aaltje Scheltes Halsema and still later of Gaije Hindriks.

A: Direction to Oldenklooster.

B: Direction to Groot Halsum/Feddemahuis.

C: Direction to Nijenklooster.

D: Molenrijster Moat.

Soon Cornelis Jans lost his elderly father and, it seems, also his mother, who certainly did not become very old. She was still mentioned in September 1734 when she was witness at a baptism, but then disappeared from the records. Guardians¹³ were appointed over him and as an orphan he was apprenticed to a baker. It seems obvious that he learned that trade from his half-uncle Hijbel Jans in Molenrij. Soon after his marriage in 1753 he managed to buy the old bakery of Jan Geerts in Molenrij from Hindrik Elings and Brechtje Goverts, who then moved to Visvliet in the Westerkwartier. Cornelis Jans married Anje Jans, daughter of the farmers Jan Ottes and Trijnje Jacobs, who used the land east of Molenrij and who are the direct ancestors of the families Bos and Ten Oever.

Apparently Cornelis Jans saw a better future in farming, for in 1761 he had already sold his bakery for 1,161 guilders and 10 nickels.¹⁴ A year earlier he and his wife had bought a small farm of 32 acres with a fixed rent of 98 guilders (a so-called 'beklemming').¹⁵ For this they borrowed 1,500 guilders from her parents, Jan Ottes and Trijnje Jacobs and her uncle Remge Ottes, probably to be able to pay for the cattle and farm equipment.¹⁶ However, the couple was not very

successful in farming and was forced to sell the place after about ten years. Cornelis Jans and Anje Jans became destitute and spent the rest of their life as laborers in Molenrij. The inheritance of 2,500 guilders from her parents in 1774 and the money from her unmarried uncle Remge Ottes (probably at least 1,000 guilders) disappeared into a bottomless pit.¹⁷ In Molenrij, Cornelis Jans and Anje Jans lived in a small new

¹³ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-141, 22-1-1754: Gerrit Edes of Den Hoorn main guardian and Willem Cornelis van Westerwijtwerd neutral guardian: both married half-sisters of Cornelis Jans.

¹⁴ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-329, fol 18, 6-4-1761.

¹⁵ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-201, 26-4-1760.

¹⁶ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-329, fol. 21, 6-4-1761.

¹⁷ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-329, fol. 111, 4-6-1774.

home south of the road. At first they were owners, but in 1778 they were forced to sell even *this* home to doctor Franciscus leCler for the meagre sum of one hundred guilders.¹⁸ However, they continued to inhabit that house, and in 1830 their son, the carpenter Jan Cornelis Werkman, still lived there.

Hijbel Jans, half-brother, and Vrouke Jans, the possible half-sister of Jan Geerts

The half-brother of Jan Geerts, Hijbel Jans, married on 14 May 1740 before the Catholic priest of Den Hoorn with Loukje Jans of Obergum, a daughter of Jan Derks and Beertje Jacobs. Hijbel may have learned the baker's trade from his half-brother Jan Geerts in Molenrij. Could he, after his marriage, have assisted the widow of his half-brother for a couple of years in their bakery? It is possible that he later opened up a bakery in the nearby town of Oldenklooster, where he was living in 1747. In February 1746 Hijbel delivered bread to the Catholic poor.¹⁹ Around 1750 Hijbel Jans and his wife moved back to Molenrij again, where they took over the bakery on the north side of the road. Seven of their children were baptized in the years 1741-1755. Hijbel's half-sister-in-law, Aagtje Julles, notably never appeared as godmother at one of these baptisms. Could there have been friction between the families?

Hijbel Jans died around 1755, whereupon his widow remarried in 1757. Her new husband was Jannes Jans. In 1760 they sold their bakery to Protestants. Maybe Jannes Jans was not an experienced baker, or maybe they could not compete with the other bakery. It is interesting that, as mentioned before, Cornelis Jans, a nephew of Hijbel Jans, had just taken over the bakery on the south side of the road. In the period 1755-1760 both bakeries in Molenrij were operated by Catholics, not a happy state of affairs. At any rate both of Hijbel's daughters, Aaltje Hijbels and Beertje Hijbels (and therefore half nieces of Jan Geerts) were not very successful in life. The oldest daughter married a tradesman and died shortly thereafter, the second daughter married twice, both times a laborer.

The godmother at the baptism of Julle, in November 1730, the only son of Jan Geerts and Aagtje Julles is worth noting. Her name was Vrouke Jans. Could it be, that Vrouke Jans was *also* a half-sister of Jan Geerts? This Vrouke Jans played role in the sodomy trial against an elderly glass maker, Cornelis Boersma, at Den Hoorn in 1730.²⁰ She had much to tell about what was going on inside the little Catholic underground church. She suggested that Cornelis Boersema felt guilty and unworthy to sit in the front of the church, and this was not doing his case any good at all. For us it is more interesting that she was said to be 19 years old, and therefore, that she was born around 1711. Unfortunately we don't know enough about her life in order to form a definite opinion as to whether she was family or not. Maybe her life in the Marne was no longer very attractive, after her unfavorable eyewitness testimony against Cornelis Boersema. He was well supported later in the trial by practically the entire Catholic congregation. At any rate, she moved to Groningen. There she married in 1744 the widower Hindrik Camps (who died in 1761). Together they had a bleaching business. Vrouke Jans married for the second time in 1763 with the widower Jan Oostindier. She died in 1770 and her second husband in 1775. Her only surviving daughter was called Aaltje, possibly named after her mother.

In 1763 guardians were appointed over Vrouke's children in Groningen.²¹ These guardians represented their father as well as their mother. It is worth noting that the guardian on Vrouke's side (the kins guardian) was Gaije Hindriks. Gaije Hindriks lived on the large farm in Molenrij and was at the same time a cattle salesman. He was the son and successor of Hindrik Freerks and Aaltje Scheltes Halsema, but how exactly he was related to Vrouke is not clear. He could not have been a close relative. There is no real proof that he or his wife Jantje Jannis (born in Lellens) were related to Jan Geerts and Aagtje Julles. If Vrouke Jans were indeed a half-sister of Jan Geerts, you would expect that her nephew and godchild Julle Jans would have been a much more obvious candidate in 1763 to be kins guardian over her children.

¹⁸ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-839, fol. 4v, 2-5-1778.

¹⁹ GrA, RK parochie Den Hoorn, inv.nr. 350 (10-2-1746).

²⁰ R. Paping, 'Sodomie in de Marne (1730)', *Stad en Lande* (2010).

²¹ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven inv.nr. III hh (12-4-1763).

The position of Jan Geerts and Aagtje Julles in Molenrij

But how did Jan Geerts himself fare? As baker he fulfilled an important role in the economic life of the village. In the Groningen countryside people did not bake their own bread, but bought it at the local bakery.²² In the eighteenth century they mainly ate rye bread, which was sold in large chunks of 4 to 8 lbs. Rye bread was the most important food of the time. Potatoes were still pretty rare, although that would change quickly in the second half of the eighteenth century. Crushed grain, mixed with butter milk to make gruel, also played an important role in the diet. Round bread and such, made from wheat, was rarely eaten, and then only on feast days by the wealthier section of the population. Jan Geerts might also have baked cattle-feeding cakes for the local farmers. It is also possible that Jan Geerts or Aagtje Julles had a small shop attached, or a pub. This was a fairly common practice for bakers of the Groningen countryside. Because there was no bakery in Oldenklooster or nearby Wierhuizen, they probably sold bread there also. The necessary rye was locally grown but some was also imported from outside the Groningen clay lands. There was definitely at least one bakery at the end of the sixteenth century in Molenrij and by around 1650 there were at least two. One of these bakeries was owned by the ancestors of the well known Catholic Groningen family Bos, the bakers Otte Sickes around 1650, his son Remt Ottes around 1685, and later Remt's son Otte Rempts. This last one, however, changed from baking to farming on provincial lands. The Halsemas were therefore not the only well-to-do farming family with bakers in their direct ancestry.

In 1730 baker Jan Geerts was required to pay one guilder according to the tax register, the lowest amount possible. It seems like a very small amount, but judging by the number of collections, about half the population did not have to pay *any* taxes. At the same time, baker Harm Jans Vliedorp, who lived on the north side of the road was also taxed for one guilder. The other tradesmen in Molenrij who had to pay something were the glass maker Lammert Jans and cooper Jacob Uges with each one and a half guilders, and blacksmith Klaas Roelfs two guilders. The wealthiest tradesman was the grain miller Hindrik Uitjes, who was charged six guilders. The farmers in and around Molenrij also had to pay large amounts: Hindrik Freerks (the father of Gaije Hindriks) six guilders, farmer Jacob Ottens on Ubbemaheerd three guilders, his mother, the widow of Otte Rempts on the farm east of Molenrij, four guilders and Derk Jacobs on the farm a little to the west, five guilders. Jan Geerts seemed to have belonged to the lower middle class.

Still, Jan Geerts was financially not doing badly at that time. In fact, he managed to buy the property of a substantial piece of land of 9 acres between 1730 and 1737. This land earlier belonged to Aaltje Willems, the widow of Cornelis Redmers at Westerwijtwerd and lies north of Molenrij in a long strip, along the road to present day's Kleine Huisjes. Once it might have belonged to the family Boelens at Feddemahuis, the family of Aaltje Willems. Around 1730 it was still being used by Klaas Pieters Keur, innkeeper in Molenrij. Jan Geerts probably kept a few cows there. In that period, it was common for more prosperous tradesmen to keep a small farming interest along with their main source of income. After 1737 Jan Geerts is no longer mentioned in the source documents. The precise date of his death is unknown but he must have died before June 1743.²³

Aagtje Julles, Widow of Jan Geerts, married again to Miller Jan Jans Roo

In May 1744 Aagtje Julles married again. Her new husband was Jan Jans Roo. At his wedding he was said to have come from Warfhuizen. The marriage registers noted that this was her second marriage, but that was not said of him. Jan Jans Roo was probably not born in Warfhuizen, but was only living there at the time of his marriage. Unfortunately, nothing is known of his family. He might have come from Germany. Around the time of their wedding in 1744, Jan Roo and Aagtje Julles took over the grain mill in Molenrij from Hindrik Uitjes. Hendrik Uitjes moved to a farm in Westerklooster. We noted that the miller Hindrik Uitjes around 1730 was one of the richest people in Molenrij, and acquiring the mill was undoubtedly a further step forward for Aagtje Julles. The move might also have had something to do with the lack of experience as baker of Aagtje's new baked spouse.

²² R. Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers. Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de groninger klei, 1770-1860* (Groningen 1995) 85-87, 244-249.

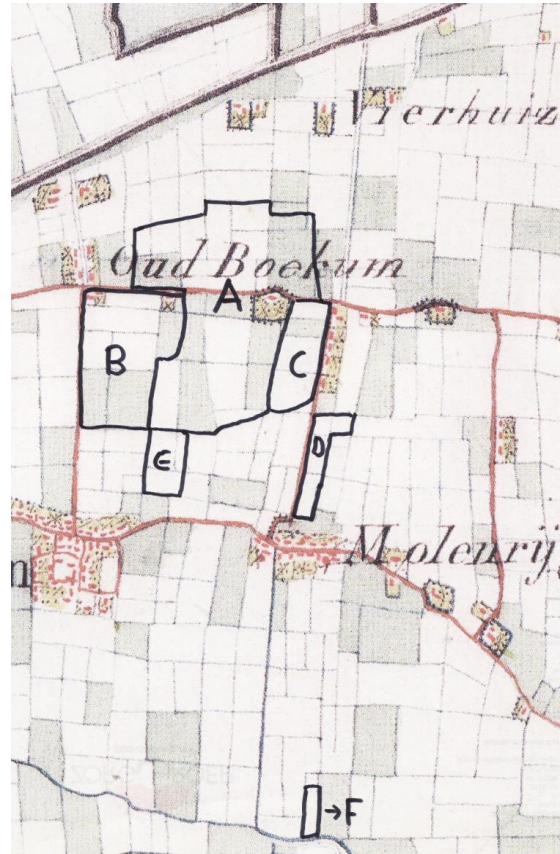
²³ GrA, RK pariochie Den Hoorn, inv.nr. 350 (9-6-1743)

Sketch of the land of Groot Halsum and of Jan Geerts in the 18th century

Legend:

- A.** The 70 (or possibly 79.5) acres of Groot Halsum.
- B.** The 30 acres of Groot Halsum split off that went to the farm Dam.
- C.** The 14 acres that once belonged to 'Klein Halsum'.
- D.** the 9 acres bought by Jan Geerts, later belonging to Jan Jules.
- E.** The second set of 9 acres belonging to Jan Jules.
- F.** The 3 acres bought by Jan Jans Roo.

Aagtje did not need to move far away, for they practically lived beside the mill of Molenrij. At this mill the rye, that was used in the bakery, was ground. Sometimes they also ground cattle feed and, very occasionally, wheat. The mill in Molenrij was according to a picture from 1727 already a 'top turner'. This larger and more expensive type of mill replaced the more traditional 'standerd' mill. The old bakery was immediately taken over in 1744 by Hindrik Elings and Brechtje Goverts, who came from Friesland. Interestingly, Jan Geerts had earlier, in 1725, bought the bakery from the parents of Hendrik Elings. Had Hindrik Elings in Friesland possibly become homesick for Kloosterburen?



On 16 May 1746 Aagtje Jules bought, together with her second husband Jan Jans Roo, another 2½ acres land for 243 guilders and 3 nickels.²⁴ This land later referred to as 3 acres, lies a little to the south of Molenrij along the Molenrijster Moat. This land was once the property of a certain Cornelis Jans. His daughter, Antje or Annechien Cornelis, lived in the city of Groningen and sold it together with her third husband Hindrik Sijmens. Sometime between 1767 and 1783 this land ends up in the hands of Jan Jans and Martje Cornelis, also bakers in Molenrij and living in the old bakery of Jan Geerts. Maybe one or both were heirs of Jan Jans Roo, about whose family background we know nothing. Jan and Martje sold the right to use this land ('beklemming') to the local blacksmith, Rijpke Allerts.

In 1756 Jan Roo became main guardian over the children of Willem Freerks and Trijnje Drewes. His stepson, Julle Jans, their uncle-in-law, became kins guardian, and Rense Eelkes a neighbor, neutral guardian.²⁵ The mother of Aagtje Jules, Jan Roo's wife, was after all Griete Sijwerts, who probably was a sister of Drewes Sijwerts, the father of Trijnje Drewes. Jan Roo was therefore a cousin-in-law of the deceased mother of the children. Further, Jan Jans Roo was appointed main guardian in 1765 over Sijtse Harms, the son of Aagtje Sijtses by the completely impoverished laborer Harm Roelfs in Westerklooster. It is not clear if he was in any way related to this Harm Roelfs.²⁶

Aagtje Jules seemed to have died in 1782, for there is talk of 'the estate' of Aagtje Jules, an expression which suggested that there were heirs, other than her son Julle Jans. Could it be that the heirs of her husband Jan Jans Roo also had some rights to the inheritance? At any rate, Julle Jans became in 1782 the owner of the rye mill. This he donated as a kind of 'free gift' i.e. as a 'dowry' to his son Jan Jules, together with the 'beklemming' of the already mentioned 9 acres of land (rent 30½ guilders to the estate of Aagtje Jules) as well as the 'beklemming' of 9 acres of formerly provincial land (also rent 30½ guilders to lord Alberda van Dijksterhuis), that he himself had bought between 1772 and 1782. Jan Jules had just married Aagtje Harms

²⁴ GrA, RK parochie Den Hoorn, inv.nr. 437.

²⁵ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-839, 30-4-1763; 1-3-1766; 14-8-1769; 18-9-1773.

²⁶ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, inv.nr. 734-839, 2-11-1765.

two months earlier.²⁷ Jan and Aagtje would remain millers in Molenrij until the start of 1789, after which they moved into a reasonably large farm in Nienklooster.



Molenrij around 1905. The mill on the right is the successor of the old mill of Jan Roo and later of Jan Julles. The building on the left was probably the bakery of Hijbel Jans (now it is the B&B de Sokkeraai)

Speculations about the parents of Jan Geerts

Let us return to the founding father, Jan Geerts. We really do not know his parents. However, based on our earlier discussions we might make some speculative attempt at finding their names. Judging by the first names of the daughters of Jan Geerts and his half-brother Hijbel Jans, their mother was called Aaltje. The only surviving daughter of his possible sister Vrouke Jans by Hindrik Camps was called Allegonda Camps, i.e. also Aaltje.

It is worth noting, that Popke Freerks in 1725 acted as guarantor for the unmarried Jan Geerts. This might suggest a family relationship. Popke Freerks married only in 1726 and he is a son of Freerk Popkes and Sara Klaasen. The possible half-sister of Jan Geerts, Vrouke Jans, has as kins guardian (who must be her relative) Gaije Hindriks, cattle salesman and farmer in Kloosterburen, a son of Hindrik Freerks and Aaltje Scheltes Halsema, and a grandson of the same Freerk Popkes and Sara Klaasen. This Freerk Popkes is first cooper and later farmer in Molenrij on the large farm there. He is a son of Popke Rinnes and Geertje Freerks and all his relatives are known. Sara Klaasen is however still a mystery.

We know that Sara Klaasen already was dead in 1709, and Freerk Ubbes was then the main guardian over the minor children of Freerk Popkes and the late Sara Klaasen. It is possible that the guardians were appointed in connection with the death of the grandfather. This grandfather is unknown to us, but still in 1709 he seemed to have bought 5¼ acres from the widow of pastor Dalhofs. He also left a legacy to his niece Imke Pieters. Unfortunately we don't know anything for sure about her, than that Imke married Pieter Hindriks in 1711 and in 1724 remarried the widower Jelis Jans in Eenrum, who was a farmer there. The guardians were presumably appointed because the children of Sara Klaasen inherited directly from this grandfather. The main guardian, Freerk Ubbes, was married to Grietje Isebrants and lived on the Kruisstee farm near Usquert.²⁸ He is a son of Ubbe Jelmers and Trijntje Jans of Usquert and she is a daughter of Isebrant Jans and Grietje Heeres in Rottum. It is still not clear how Freerk Ubbes was related to Sara Klaasen.

²⁷ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, 734-329, fol. 165, 14-9-1782. See also 734-330, fol. 30v, 13-6-1772.

²⁸ See GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, 734-199, 12-2-1714.

In 1693 Freerk Popkes took over provincial land situated west of Bokum, which seemed to have been attached to the buildings he bought from cooper Peter Heinens.²⁹ At first Freerk Popkes was himself also a cooper. In December 1694 he was asked by Hibbe Folkerts to become main guardian over the three minor children of his newlywed wife Martien Cornelis by the late Jan Jans. The Anabaptist, Cornelis Simons, became kins guardian during the division of the estate, and Otte Rempts became neutral guardian. Jan Jans could have been the son of Jan Rikkerts in Kloosterburen, how he is related to Freerk Popkes is unknown.

For Sara Klaasen to be related to Jan Geerts, the kinship has to run through his mother, taking into account that Gaije Hindriks acted as kins guardian for his possible half-sister. Jan Geerts's mother might have been a sister of Sara Klaasen, in which case her name would be Aaltje Klaasen. There is one tiny hint suggesting that this might be true. On November 28, 1728 a Catholic Klaas Geerts of Kloosterburen married Trinje Klaasen. They had four children, named Geert, Jan, Geert and Aafke, of whom the last one was born in January 1737 in Oldenklooster. This Klaas Geerts could have been a brother of Jan Geerts. The names of the witnesses at the baptism unfortunately do not support this thesis: Geeske Ijlles, Catherina Geerts, Trinje Scheltes Halsema (married to Freerk Willems, farmer at the Halsemaheerd), and Grietje Tewes (married with Thomas Tonnis, farmer in Oldenklooster). In 1740 Klaas Geerts's widow lived in a house near Dam, of which the ground ('heem') belonged to the lords Tjarda van Starkenborgh. The place where his house was situated would indicate that Klaas Geerts probably was a farm laborer.³⁰ If the mother of Jan Geerts really was Aaltje Klaasen, then this suggests that his father would be Geert Jans, assuming that Jan was named after his grandfather. It is possible therefore, that the names of the founding parents of this family Halsema would be Geert Jans and Aaltje Klaasen. Such a couple has unfortunately not yet been found in documentary sources.

²⁹ GrA, Oud-Rechterlijke Archieven, 734-97, 27-10-1693; 11-12-1694; 8-4-1695.

³⁰ GrA, Archief Tjarda van Starkenborgh, inv. nr. 32-2 and inv.nr. 50.